

STATE TRANSPORTATION BOARD OF GEORGIA

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:
Thursday, June 18, 2009

Contact: David Spear
(404) 631-1825

TRANSPORTATION BOARD ELECTS VANCE SMITH, JR., TO BE NEW GEORGIA DOT COMMISSIONER

ATLANTA – State Representative Vance Smith, Jr., R-Pine Mountain, chairman of the House Transportation Committee has been named commissioner of the Georgia Department of Transportation. Smith was unanimously elected today by the State Transportation Board. He will take office Thursday, June 25.

“I am honored and humbled to have been chosen and excited to start work,” Smith said. “There are great challenges facing the Department; I see these challenges more as opportunities to make a good transportation system the best it can be. I look forward to working with the Board, the Governor, the General Assembly, our partner agencies and the experienced Georgia DOT staff to make these opportunities reality.” (The full statement of Commissioner-Elect Smith and a biographical sketch are included with this release.)

Board Chairman Bill Kuhlke, Jr., said the \$2.4 billion-per-year, 5,400-employee agency is fortunate to gain the leadership and perspective of Smith. “Vance knows transportation and no one is more committed to improving it than he is. He understands this Department’s greatest need is to have adequate resources to build and maintain a multimodal transportation system that will help alleviate congestion, promote safety and pave the way for the infrastructure and mobility necessary to promote economic development. He worked tirelessly for additional and much needed transportation funding, and his legislative acumen will help us secure it.”

Smith succeeds Gerald Ross who has served as interim commissioner since February and who now will return to his previous position as the Department’s chief engineer. “I can’t say enough about the magnificent job Gerald has done under very difficult circumstances,” Kuhlke commented. “We’re very much indebted to him.”

A 17-year veteran of the Georgia House of Representatives (the past five as transportation committee chairman), the 57-year-old Smith operated a family-owned construction business in Pine Mountain for 30 years. He is a graduate of Columbus State University. He and his wife, Michele, have three children and five grandchildren.

The State Transportation Board determines policy and exercises general governance of Georgia’s Department of Transportation. The Board’s 13 members, representing each of the state’s congressional districts, serve staggered, five-year terms. Board members are elected by those state senators and representatives whose legislative districts fall within all or part of the relevant congressional district.

The Georgia Department of Transportation is committed to providing a safe, seamless and sustainable transportation system that supports Georgia's economy and is sensitive to both its citizens and its environment. For general information on the Georgia DOT, please visit our Web site (www.dot.ga.gov).

Statement by Georgia Department of Transportation Commissioner-Elect Vance Smith, Jr.

I am honored and humbled to have been chosen commissioner of the Georgia Department of Transportation and excited to start work. It is probably not a huge secret that I have wanted to serve in this capacity for awhile now – because I believe I can help make a difference. There are great challenges facing the Department. I see these challenges as opportunities to take a good transportation system and make it better.

I look forward to working with the Board, the Governor, the General Assembly, and our partner agencies. I also want to listen and learn from the dedicated, knowledgeable and experienced men and women of the Georgia DOT – they have much to offer. We must ALL continue building a collaborative approach to make these opportunities reality. The Department cannot solve these issues alone; neither can the governor; nor the legislature. We have to work as a team – in close coordination with our local governments, federal, state and local transportation agencies; metropolitan planning organizations, regional development districts and the business community. With all of us working together – we can. We will.

In my capacity as a state legislator, and especially as transportation committee chairman, I have worked to understand the issues confronting not just the Department, but all transportation interests in Georgia. I know that Georgia needs a seamless, interconnected transportation system made up of multiple modes of transportation that will serve urban commuters as well as rural communities. Each and every Georgian deserves a safe, dependable, well-managed transportation system that helps improve their quality of life, as well as economic opportunities - by offering enhanced connectivity and less congestion that will help attract commercial, industrial and retail businesses to cities and towns from Toccoa to Thomasville.

Georgia DOT's greatest need is new funding sources. We need a comprehensive, sustainable source of revenue that will allow us to take advantage of every opportunity to grow our transportation system in all modes and in all corners of the state. I'm committed to exploring every possible funding option. We will continue to look for ways to be more efficient in our day-to-day operations. We will work with the Georgia General Assembly to implement a T-SPLOST that will serve the whole of Georgia. We will work with our representatives in Congress to keep them apprised of our needs and help them fight to bring our share of the federal funds home. We will move swiftly and expeditiously on Public Private Partnerships. We cannot wait any longer to take advantage of this funding alternative to help relieve congestion, increase mobility, and better connect our ports to our highway and rail systems so that we can move goods and products quickly and efficiently.

Most folks know that I did not support Senate Bill 200 –the governance bill. I believed in my heart that was not the path we needed to travel. BUT, it is the law, and I will uphold it and abide by it. I will work with the planning director to offer Georgia a comprehensive transportation plan that will meet our needs and address our problems. Georgia DOT will deliver these projects, within federal and state guidelines – as quickly and effectively as humanly possible.

The time has come to put differences aside, to commit towards bettering transportation in Georgia. We need to roll up our sleeves and get to work – side by side – towards a common goal. I'm confident that together we can put Georgia in the national forefront for meeting its citizens' 21st Century transportation needs.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Vance Smith, Jr., was elected Commissioner of the Georgia Department of Transportation on June 18, 2009, and takes office June 25, 2009.

He was elected to the Georgia House of Representatives in 1993 and has continuously served the 129th District, which includes Troup, Harris and Muscogee counties, since that time. He has been Chairman of the House Transportation Committee for the past five years and also most recently has served as a member of the Appropriations, Economic Development & Tourism, and Rules committees. In 2006 and 2007, he served as a floor leader for Governor Sonny Perdue. He co-chaired (with Senate Transportation Committee Chairman Jeff Mullis, R-Chickamauga) the General Assembly's 2007 Joint Study Committee on Transportation Funding.

Smith is a graduate of Columbus State University with a degree in economics. In addition to his public service career, he managed a family-owned construction and earth moving business which was in operation for nearly 60 years and specialized in golf course development among other projects.

A Georgia native, Smith was born in Columbus, but spent most of his life in Pine Mountain where he currently resides with his wife of 35 years, Michele. The couple has three grown children and five grandchildren. They attend St. Paul's United Methodist Church in Columbus.

Smith is a member of the Pine Mountain Chamber of Commerce and the Harris County Library Board. He served on the Harris County Commission from 1987-1990 and was chairman of that body in 1989-1990. In addition, he has served as a board member for the Boy Scouts of America Chattahoochee Council, the West Georgia Technical College and the Harris County Chamber of Commerce. Smith is a 1997 graduate of the Leadership Georgia program.

Nationally, Smith has held posts with the Council of State Governments, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the Southern Legislative Conference and the American Legislative Exchange Council.

###